

ITEM 9-A

CITY OF ALAMEDA

Memorandum

To: Honorable President and
Members of the Planning Board

From: Christina Ratcliffe, AICP,
Planner I

Date: December 12, 2011

Re: Direct Planning Staff regarding interpretation of the Design Review Guidelines and either approve or deny the Design Review application for 219 Santa Clara.

BACKGROUND

The application is for a Design Review of a single family residence. The applicant proposes to remove wood siding and shingles and replace them with stucco. The windows will not be changed, and the trim and shutters are proposed to be replaced with vinyl to be a visual match to the existing features

DISCUSSION

The owner/applicant initially came in to the Community Development Department seeking a building permit to remove the existing wood siding and replace with stucco. The wood has suffered damage from weathering and termites and the applicant wished to replace the wood with a more durable material. As this was an exterior change, the Building Division Staff referred Applicant to Planning Staff for a Design Review determination. Because the project was not a renovation and the proposed materials were not a visual match to the existing material, Staff could not exempt the project, and therefore took in the Design Review application.

During review of the application, a site visit to the property was made. City records indicate the home was built in 1944. This time period is also reflected in the surrounding homes. There is a mix of homes with both stucco and wood siding, with stucco being the most predominant exterior treatment.

The applicant's home has predominantly horizontal wood siding. The front gable features square butt shingles, which are repeated in the secondary gable. There are faux shutters framing the front and entryway windows, which also have a distinctive window cap. There is also a wood scalloped detail above the entryway.

In order to grant Design Review approval, the following findings must be made:

- a. The proposed design is consistent with the *General Plan, Zoning Ordinance*, and the *City of Alameda Design Review Manual*.
- b. The proposed design is appropriate for the site, is compatible with adjacent or neighboring buildings or surroundings, and promotes harmonious transitions in scale and character in areas between different designated land uses; and
- c. The proposed design of the structure(s) and exterior materials and landscaping are visually compatible with the surrounding development, and design elements have been incorporated to ensure the compatibility of the structure with the character and uses of adjacent development.

Staff believes that findings “b” and “c” can be made, as the proposed design is in keeping with other residences in the area and the exterior materials and design elements are visually compatible with the surrounding development. (Please see photos, Attachment 3)

Finding “a” presents a difficulty for Staff. The finding requires that the proposed “design is consistent with the *General Plan, Zoning Ordinance*, and the *City of Alameda Design Review Manual*.”¹

While the stucco material has a “harmonious relationship with the surrounding area” as called out on Page 6 of the *Design Manual*; page 38 of the *Guide to Residential Design* states: “Buildings with original wood siding or shingles should not be stuccoed in an attempt to modernize the appearance.”

Staff notes that the details of the siding and square butt shingles are more apparent from the sidewalk than from the street view. Staff believes that while these details are unique, they are not, in this particular case representative of any particular architectural style and their removal would not have the effect of “modernizing” the structure. Therefore the removal of these features might be supported.

¹ It should be noted that while Finding “a” sites the *Design Review Manual* as the source document, Page 4 of the *Guide to Residential Design* notes that:

“...For residential projects, the *Guide to Residential Design* constitutes the *Design Review Manual* referred to in subsection 30-37.5 and 30-38.5 of the Development Regulations.”

Staff agreed that the stucco would be compatible with the design in the neighborhood. Many of the adjacent houses are stucco and constructed in the same time frame as the applicant's home. Taken in the neighborhood context, the use of stucco on this residence as proposed, would not be viewed as "modernizing" the home.

However, Staff's current direction in applying the *Design Guidelines* prevents making finding "a"; in that the *Guidelines* specifically call out that "buildings with original wood siding or shingles should not be stuccoed in an attempt to modernize the appearance."

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The project is Categorically Exempt from State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15301. Existing Facilities.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Board review the Report and give direction regarding the interpretation of the *Guide to Residential Design*. Is the section prohibiting stucco over wood meant to avoid a modernization of an architectural style only? For example, stuccoing over a Victorian Stick or a Colonial. If this is the case, Staff believes that using stucco over the wood siding of this particular residence would not modernize the architectural style, and therefore all the findings could be made to approve the project.

However, should the Board interpret the section as applying to all residential structures that are built with wood siding or shingles, regardless of architectural significance; then finding "a" could not be made in favor of the project as submitted.

Staff has prepared two Draft Resolutions for the Board's consideration; one for approval, and one for denial. Because this agenda item was noticed as a public hearing, the members of the Board may add, remove or alter any condition, or deny the application, as they consider appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

Christina Ratcliffe, AICP,
Planner I

Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution - Conditions of Approval
2. Draft Resolution - Denying the Application
3. Photos